


## Article

# The Impact of Short-Term Rental Accommodation in Urban Tourism: A Comparative Analysis of Tourists' and Residents' Perspectives

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**Abstract:** Urban tourism has witnessed significant growth in recent years, driven by various factors that foster the transformation of urban areas into tourist hotspots. These factors include a rising interest in culture and heritage, ongoing urban redevelopment and conversion processes, and the introduction of new experiences and activities. Two particularly influential factors contributing to this growth are low-cost travel, which facilitates more accessible access to urban destinations, and the emergence of new types of accommodation, such as short-term rental (also known as local accommodation or Airbnb-type accommodation). The sudden and continuous growth of this type of tourist accommodation brings new challenges to cities and local communities. On the positive side, it contributes to job opportunities, the dynamism of the local economy, and urban revitalization. On the other hand, it also represents more difficulty in retaining the local population in city centers, as more and more buildings are converted into hostels and tourist apartments. In this context, it becomes essential to conduct studies evaluating the impacts of these dynamics in urban areas and how they influence residents' and visitors' perspectives. Therefore, this study aims to identify the main transformations resulting from short-term rental (STR) development, focusing on the impacts felt by tourists and residents in Porto. A questionnaire was distributed to tourists and residents in Porto's city center in June 2023. The results reveal differences in opinions between tourists and residents, particularly concerning historical heritage preservation, local population relocation, and reduced housing availability for residents. Nevertheless, there is a similarity in their opinions regarding the stimulus that local accommodation brings to the economy and the rehabilitation of buildings and urban areas. This study reinforces the need to pay more attention to the future development of tourist accommodation in city centers, especially regarding local policies and territorial planning, to balance better tourism development and local communities' quality of life.

**Keywords:** local accommodation; urban tourism; impacts; residents' perspectives; visitors' perspectives



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## 1. Introduction

Urban tourism is a growing phenomenon and has become a significant economic driver for many cities worldwide [1], especially in Europe. As cities continue to attract more tourists, their urban environments have been transformed to accommodate the growing influx of visitors. Special attention has been given to urban centers that are part of world heritage sites, for which the local community's support and participation in sustainable tourism development and heritage conservation is critical [2].

Urban tourism growth creates challenges concerning using natural resources and environmental changes [3]. It also has socio-cultural impacts; affects fair working conditions;

and puts pressure on infrastructure, mobility, security, and consequently, the relationship with host communities. This transformation has provoked several constraints in the daily life of the residents. Concerns about the increase in urban tourism and its sustainability issues are evident in the recommendations from the World Tourism Organization on Urban Tourism [4] and the Lisbon Declaration on Sustainable Urban Tourism [5]. The importance of urban tourism goes beyond the tourism sphere and is aligned with the UN 2030 Agenda, making the SDGs the common framework to align all relevant actors in urban tourism, namely with Goal 11 on “Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable” [6]. Therefore, understanding the effects of tourism on local populations and their quality of life is a priority, especially in the framework of post-pandemic recovery [7].

Research in this area has focused mainly on the residents’ perspective and how they view tourist activity and its impacts on their communities [8]. More recently, special attention has also been paid to tourism’s impact on the local population’s decision to settle where tourist activity is more intense [9]. When it turns out that residents see tourism as something positive and that it benefits the local community, they are more willing to collaborate in tourist initiatives and dynamics [10], especially in a context of economic benefits [9]. As such, it is very important to devote more attention to studying tourism’s impact on residents’ lives [11], especially in contexts of consolidated tourist destinations, in which higher tourist pressure leads to a greater propensity to generate conflicts between visitors and the local population.

This article addresses precisely this issue related to the impacts of short-term rental (STR) in urban tourism through a double perspective of residents and visitors in Porto city. The structure of the paper introduces the theme in analysis, providing a literature review that includes topics related to urban tourism, STR, and perspectives of residents and tourists, considering its impacts on urban tourism. The methodology and materials highlight the research goals, describing the empirical study process, including the research instrument, primary data collection procedure, and data analysis. The results are discussed, and the study’s main conclusions are indicated, as well as its theoretical and practical contributions. Study limitations and future avenues for research are highlighted.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Urban Tourism

Urban tourism has become increasingly popular in recent years [12], with more and more tourists choosing to visit cities for their cultural attractions, nightlife, and shopping opportunities [13]. Urban tourism is arguably one of the most developed forms of tourism on a global scale since most of the main tourist gateways are urban destinations. This is due to different reasons, including the fact that they offer significant infrastructures and services and control the distribution and flow of tourism to other regions and countries [14]. Also, many visits are for non-leisure purposes, such as business, conferences, and family visitations [15]. Therefore, urban areas offer a geographical concentration of facilities and attractions that are conveniently located to meet the needs of visitors and residents. However, with overtourism in major European capitals, this balance has been questioned [16–19].

The literature has examined the perspectives of residents and tourists regarding urban tourism, focusing on understanding the factors that shape their attitudes and behaviors toward each other [20]. Residents in urban tourism destinations often have negative perceptions of tourists, viewing them as loud, disrespectful, and disruptive [21]. Residents also expressed concerns about the impact of tourism on their communities, such as increased traffic congestion, rising housing costs, and loss of local identity. On the other hand, residents also recognize that the overall tourism impacts are positive, when residents’ quality of life increases, thereby positively affecting their attitudes towards tourism initiatives [22], promoting community commitment, and supporting tourism development. In terms of interactions between residents and tourists, the literature [23,24] has examined the extent to which residents feel that their needs and concerns are being addressed by local authorities and tourism stakeholders [19]. Andereck and Vogt [25] mention that residents in tourist

destinations are more likely to support tourism development when they perceive that their communities benefit economically from tourism. Conversely, residents are more likely to oppose tourism when they feel excluded from decision-making processes and perceive that their quality of life is negatively affected. Overall, the literature on residents' and tourists' perspectives of urban tourism highlights the complex nature of their relationships and the importance of addressing their concerns to ensure sustainable tourism development. The literature reveals the need to keep analyzing these dynamics, identifying strategies to mitigate conflicts and promoting mutual understanding between residents and tourists in urban destinations.

## 2.2. The Short-Term Rental (STR) Phenomena

The rapid growth of STRs and its disruptive impact on the tourist experience have sparked significant interest among researchers studying its effects on urban economies [26]. The rise of STR services in different urban destinations, such as Airbnb, has significantly impacted urban tourism [27]. In a period of a decade, Airbnb encompassed about 5 million properties in around 200 countries and exceeded the number of properties of traditional accommodation of the largest global hotel chains [28]. Nevertheless, the STR's accommodation capacity, in terms of number of beds, remains lower than the capacity installed in traditional hotels, which generally consists of larger buildings and a significantly greater number of rooms and beds. STR services have become a popular alternative to traditional hotel accommodation [29], offering tourists the opportunity to stay in local neighborhoods and experience a more authentic, local way of life [30]. According to Lupu and Brochado [31], hosts' friendliness contributes the most to guests' affective well-being during their stays. This has led to a significant increase in visitors to urban areas, bringing benefits and challenges to the cities that host them. In the case of Porto, the vast majority of STRs are concentrated in a few parishes in the central city, where the capacity for Airbnb accommodation already exceeds the number of permanent residents [28]. According to Langley and Leyshon [32], STR in urban centers has evolved considerably since the 2008 financial crisis, when the development of digital platforms began to be seen as investment opportunities to rent private houses and apartments and thus generate some income for individual owners. However, this tourist accommodation business model has evolved rapidly. In the process, Airbnb has contributed to expanding the sharing economy worldwide and has significantly transformed the territory and economy of several cities, such as Porto [28]. According to the official Portuguese tourism registration data [33], currently there are 10,297 registrations of different types of STRs only in Porto city, and for the hotels, there are only 154 registrations. STR nowadays is based not only on the model of private owners renting their house (in the true home-sharing dynamic) or their properties (in a buy-to-let dynamic), but also on the professionalization of the sector with a significant increase in commercial operators and, more specifically, professional property managers [34]. On the one hand, this aspect of accommodation has boosted tourism in urban centers and brought new economic and social dynamics to local communities, with benefits in terms of the recovery of vacant buildings [35], increased investment and revenue [36], job creation, and the development of new businesses (housekeeping, laundry, food and beverage, and other operational services [37]. By providing tourists with a wider range of accommodation options, including in neighborhoods that are not traditionally touristy, STR services can help spread tourism's economic benefits more evenly throughout the city [38]. They can also help to attract a wider range of tourists, including those looking for a more authentic and local experience, who may be more likely to spend money on local businesses and support the local economy.

On the other hand, it also causes constraints and changes from a paradigm of residential long-term housing use to a touristic short-term use [39]. This change contributes to enhancing the phenomena of gentrification [40], difficulty in retaining the local population in the center of historical events [35], and the consequent increase in the feeling of loss and dispossession among the local population [41]. In fact, the literature has been paying special attention to the issues related to gentrification and brand loyalty [26,42]. As more

and more properties are turned into STRs, the demand for housing in popular tourist areas increases, leading to higher rents and property prices. This can force long-term residents out of the neighborhood, disrupting community cohesion and changing the character of the area [43]. Additionally, excessive STRs can harm the availability of affordable housing for local residents [44]. In cities where housing is already in short supply, converting properties into short-term rentals can further reduce the number of homes available for long-term residents, pushing up prices and making it even more difficult for people to find affordable housing.

For all of this, greater attention has also been paid to the regulation and supervision of this type of accommodation, with some cities even beginning to apply measures to suspend new licenses for the operation of short-term rentals or to create buffer zones in which they are not permitted [45]. The impact of STR services on urban tourism is complex and multifaceted, with both positive and negative consequences for cities and their residents [46]. It is important for policymakers to consider the potential impacts of STR services carefully and to implement regulations that balance the needs of tourists, residents, and the local economy [38]. This transformation has led to conflicts between residents and tourists [17], as residents often feel that their cities are being overrun and their quality of life is compromised.

### 2.3. The Phenomenon of Touristification in Porto

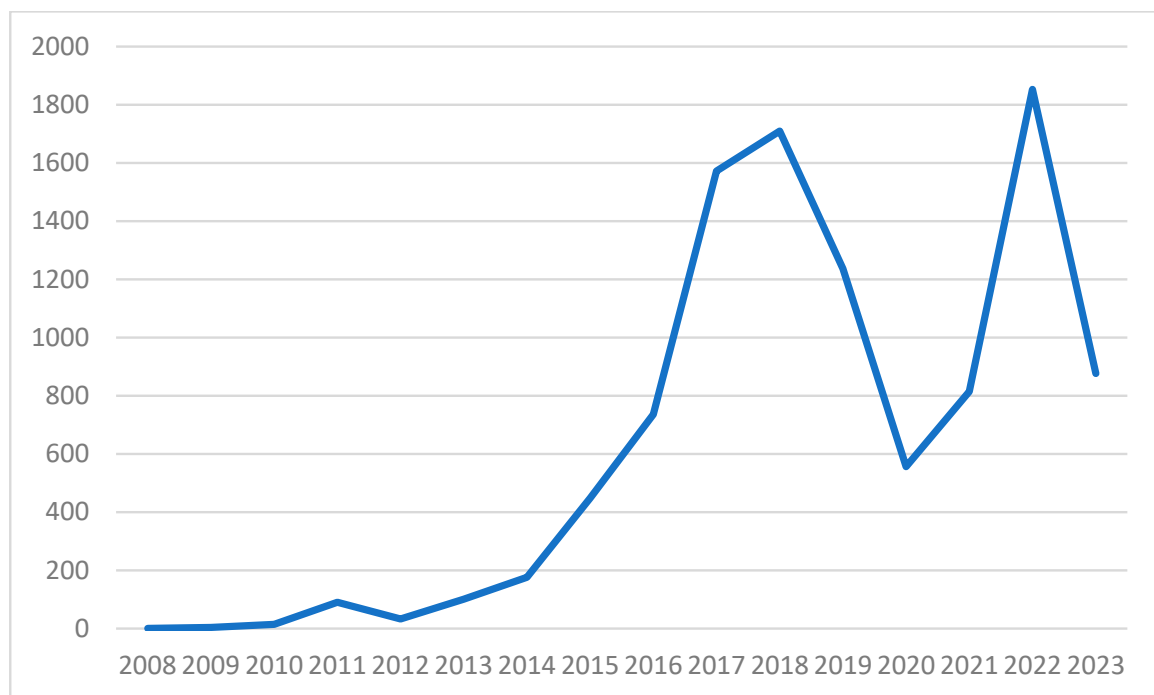
Porto, located in the northwest of Portugal (Figure 1), is considered as the second most important city in the country. It is situated along the Douro River estuary, which opens into the Atlantic Ocean. The city's historical centre is a UNESCO World Heritage Site, renowned for its picturesque architecture. The rich cultural heritage of the destination, together with strong marketing campaigns targeting international markets, have been successful in positioning Porto as a must-visit European destination [47,48].



**Figure 1.** Location of Porto Municipality (source: authors' compilation based on Official Administrative Map of Portugal and Google Satellite).

Nevertheless, there is a significant phenomenon of touristification in Porto that can be seen by the adaptation of urban spaces in providing for the needs and preferences of tourists, which is leading to changes in the local community, economy, and culture [49–51]. Touristification, driven by an influx of short-term rentals and real estate investments, has economically revitalized the city but at the cost of increasing housing prices and displacing long-term residents [49,50]. The conversion of residential properties into tourist accommodation has significantly reduced the availability of affordable housing, particularly in historic neighborhoods [52].

Figure 2 shows the evolution of the number of short-term rental accommodation registrations in the municipality of Porto between 2008 and 2023 [33]. As can be seen, the boom in the increase in local accommodation started in 2015, with the peak of registrations occurring before the pandemic in 2018, but later being surpassed in 2022.

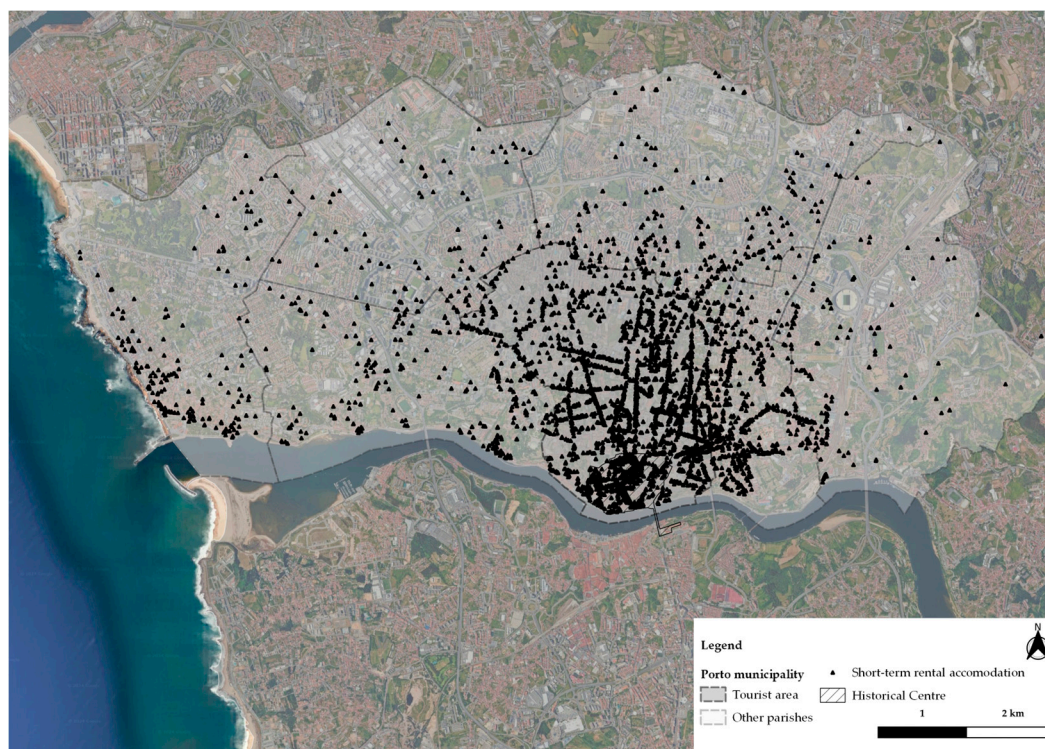


**Figure 2.** Evolution of short-term rental accommodation registrations in the municipality of Porto (source: authors' compilation based on Turismo de Portugal [33]).

Culturally, Porto's transformation has been both enriching and challenging. The expansion of STRs has been even more notable in the main tourist areas of Porto, as shown in Figure 3.

Each point of this map is one STR accommodation in the municipality of Porto. This map confirms the huge concentration in the most visited places in the city, namely the historical city center. Thus, the historic center, once characterized by its local charm and community life, is now increasingly oriented towards tourists, affecting the communities and daily life of long-term residents [47,49,50].





**Figure 3.** Short-term rental accommodation in Porto Municipality (authors' compilation based on Official Administrative Map of Portugal and Google Satellite).

### 3. Materials and Methods

In June 2023, a questionnaire was distributed to tourists and residents in Porto's city center. This questionnaire had two versions, focusing on analyzing the impact of local accommodation from the perspectives of tourists and residents. The objective was to evaluate the perceptions of tourists and residents regarding the impact of local accommodation in Porto and identify potential conflicts that may arise between tourists and residents.

The questionnaire was applied through the intercept survey methodology in the main tourist areas of Porto city center. This is a methodology that is being used in several tourism-related studies [53–56].

The researchers approached people in the street, asked if they were residents or tourists, and requested their anonymous and confidential participation in the study being carried out. The project was approved by the Portucalense University Institutional Review Board.

The questionnaire for tourists was divided into three sections: motivations and determinants to visit Porto; perceptions about accommodation and conflicts between tourists and residents; and sociodemographic profile. The questionnaire for residents was also divided into three sections: perceptions of residents about the impact of tourism; perceptions about accommodation and conflicts between tourists and residents; and sociodemographic profile. In this way, it was possible to compare the two questionnaires, namely in the section on perceptions about accommodation and conflicts between tourists and residents, which is the main focus of this analysis.

The city center of Porto was selected for two reasons: first, it is the main tourist area in Porto, which is now suffering from touristification, and, thus, where it would be easier to find respondents to the two questionnaires, and secondly, because it is the area with the highest concentration of SRTs in the city of Porto.

The sample size is based on 210 responses (101 from tourists and 109 from residents), making this an exploratory study. In the statistical data analysis, both univariate and bivariate analysis techniques were employed, involving the use of descriptive statistical measures.

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Sociodemographic Profile

Regarding the sociodemographic profile of the analyzed sample, most respondents (54%) identified as male, followed by 44% who identified as female, and 2% preferred not to respond to this question.

### 4.2. Perceptions of Tourists and Residents Regarding the Impact of Local Accommodation

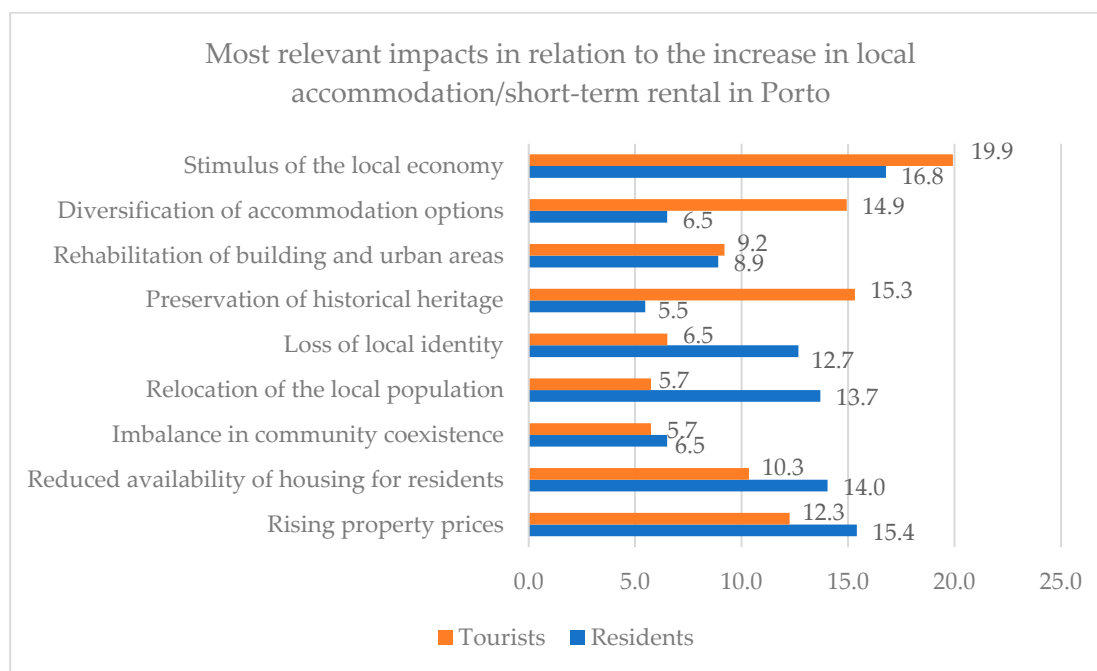
One of the first aspects analyzed in this research was tourists' and residents' perceptions of the supply of local accommodation in Porto. The question was whether they were aware of the huge growth in this type of accommodation in recent years (Figure 4).



**Figure 4.** Perception about local accommodation increase.

Around 87% of residents said they were aware of this. However, only 30% of tourists said the same, and around 35% said they were not even aware of the growth of this tourist phenomenon. This difference between responses is understandable, in one way, as residents have a deeper knowledge of the city dynamics when compared to visitors who have shorter contact with the city. Nevertheless, this increase in STR is global, and visitors are expected to be more conscious of this phenomenon.

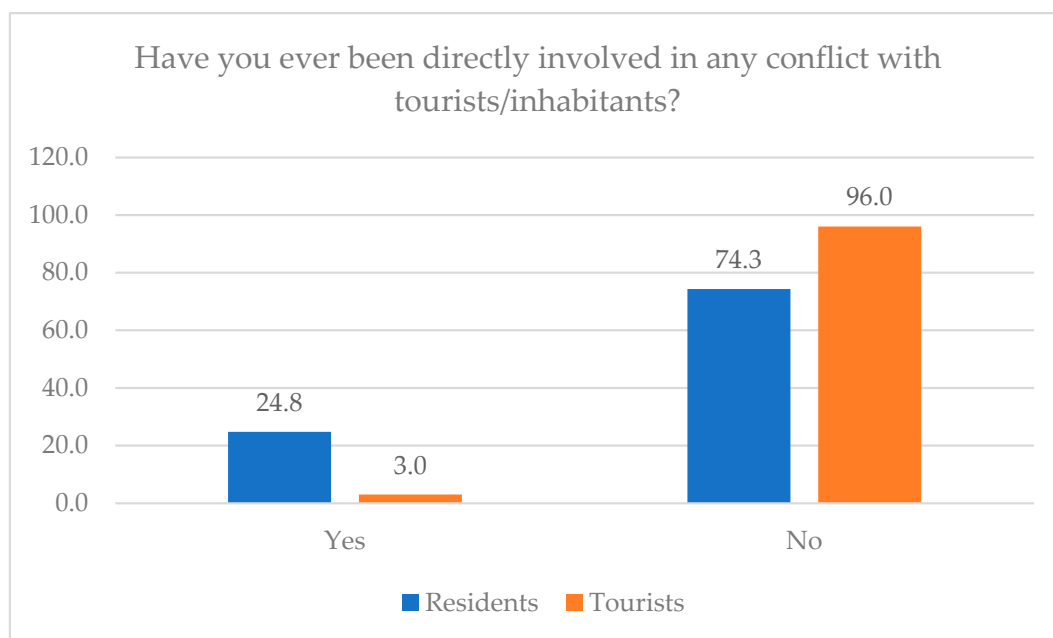
Regarding the most relevant impacts related to this growth in local accommodation in Porto, the results are shown in Figure 5. Visitors tend to identify more positive impacts, such as the stimulus of the local economy, the diversification of accommodation options, and the preservation of historical heritage. Although residents consider STR important to stimulate the economy, they tend to identify more negative impacts, such as rising property prices, reduced housing availability, relocation of the local population, and loss of local identity. Regarding the rehabilitation of buildings and urban areas and the imbalance in community existence, both perspectives of residents and visitors have similar weights.



**Figure 5.** Impacts related to local accommodation increase in Porto.

#### 4.3. Conflicts between Tourists and Residents

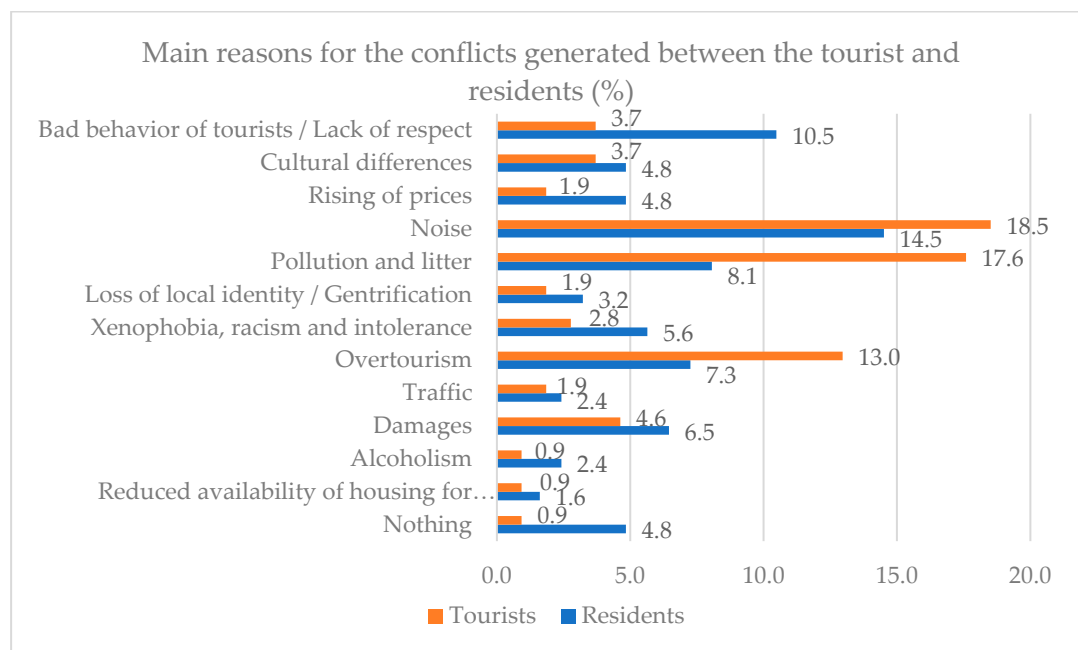
The two groups were also asked if they had ever been directly involved in a conflict between tourists and residents. No such problems have arisen in the sample under study, with 96% of tourists and around 75% of residents having never experienced conflict (Figure 6).



**Figure 6.** Conflicts between tourists and residents.

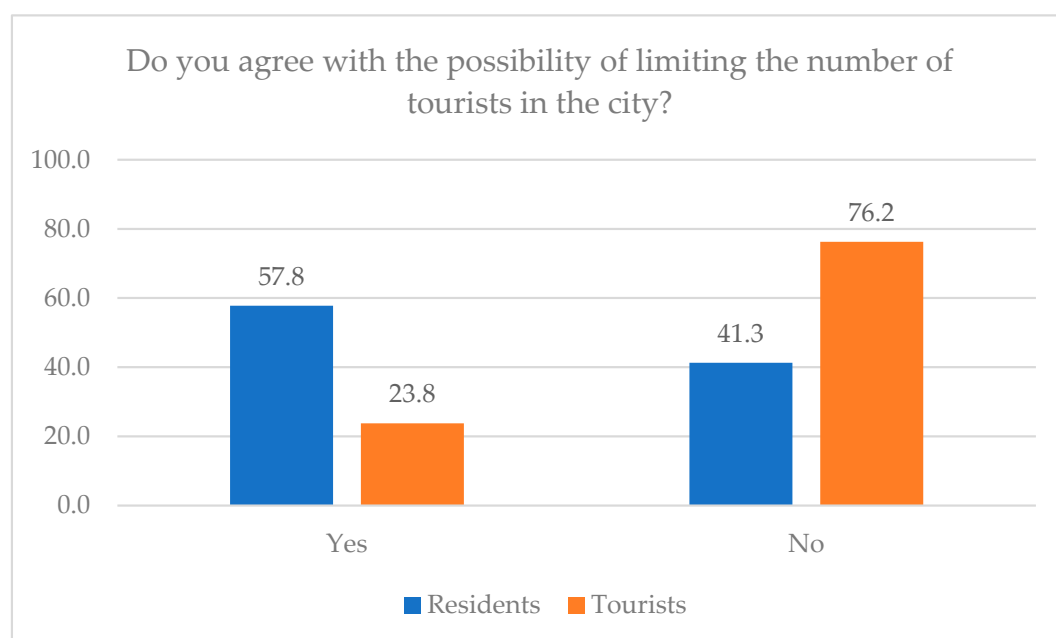
However, respondents say they know the main factors that can lead to conflicts (Figure 7). The most frequently identified aspects are noise, pollution and litter, and overtourism. In addition to these three aspects, residents highlighted tourists' bad behavior or lack of respect for the locals.





**Figure 7.** The main reasons for the conflicts between tourists and residents.

The respondents were also asked if they agreed with the possibility of limiting the number of tourists in the city (Figure 8). This question was also answered differently by the two groups of respondents. Most tourists answered that they do not agree with that limitation (76%), in contrast to residents, who had a more divided opinion, with 58% saying they agreed with the measure and 41% did not.



**Figure 8.** Opinions concerning limiting the number of tourists in Porto.

## 5. Discussion

Porto has witnessed a remarkable surge in local accommodation offerings in recent years [28], producing contrasted reactions among residents and tourists. An analysis of the impacts reveals differences in perceptions, allowing a better understanding of tourism growth and the balance of preserving local identity and community well-being.

Regarding the perception of local accommodation increase, there was a visible difference of opinion between the two groups of respondents. In fact, residents are more involved with the changes in their city. They directly experience the effects of the increase in local accommodation, such as changes in traffic, the real estate market, rents, and so on. Tourists are mainly focused on the travel experience, the sights and activities available, and are not very interested in local issues or the inner workings of the city they visit.

The results reveal some disparities and similarities regarding the impacts of this growth in local accommodation in Porto.

Tourists often view the growth of local accommodation through a lens of positive economic stimulus and enhanced travel experiences. For them, diversifying accommodation options means greater flexibility in choosing accommodation that suits their preferences and budgets. Moreover, rehabilitating buildings and urban areas is beneficial, offering visitors a more aesthetically pleasing and inviting environment to explore. Preserving Porto's rich historical heritage also stands out as a positive, providing tourists with cultural insights.

Conversely, residents acknowledge these positive impacts while expressing concerns about the potential consequences. The rehabilitation of buildings and areas is welcomed, as it improves the overall livability of neighborhoods and may even boost property values. The economic benefits, such as increased job opportunities and local business growth, are also seen as advantages for the city's residents.

Where the perspectives diverge significantly is in the recognition of negative impacts.

When visiting Porto and enchanted by its landscape and immersive historical environment, tourists are not immediately aware of the changes in local dynamics. However, residents observe the challenges that come with the rapid growth of local accommodation [28]. The loss of local identity is a concern, as traditional neighborhoods risk losing their unique character among the influx of tourists.

The relocation of the local population due to rising property prices is a fact that affects residents, who witness first-hand the challenges of finding affordable housing in a city with an increase in tourism. In addition, imbalances in community coexistence are becoming evident, with tensions resulting from differences in lifestyle, noise levels, and overcrowding in residential areas.

Despite these disparities, the similarities between groups are related to the positive impact of rehabilitating buildings and urban areas. Improved infrastructure and revitalized neighborhoods create a more attractive and enjoyable environment for all, enhancing Porto's overall appeal.

Regarding the perspectives on limiting tourists in Porto, the fact that most tourists said they did not agree with this measure reveals their desire to maintain their tourist experiences without any restrictions. On the other hand, the more divided opinion of residents may reflect growing concern about the impact of tourism growth (which may be uncontrolled), which could even lead to overtourism and high touristic pressure on destinations.

## 6. Conclusions

This study reveals notable differences in the perceptions of tourists and residents regarding the impacts of the rapid growth of short-term rental accommodation in Porto. While tourists predominantly view these developments as beneficial, enhancing their travel experiences and contributing to the local economy, residents are more attuned to the negative consequences. Tourists appreciate the increased flexibility in accommodation options and the aesthetic improvements from urban rehabilitation. However, residents are more likely to perceive negative impacts, such as the loss of local identity, rising property prices, and challenges in finding affordable housing. Despite these differences, both groups recognize the positive impact of building rehabilitation and urban area revitalization, which improves the city's overall attractiveness.

This study also highlights the complex dynamics between tourism development and local community well-being, particularly in urban areas with significant historical heritage.

The findings emphasize the importance of considering both short-term rental growth's positive and negative impacts. For policymakers and urban planners, this means balancing tourism development with measures to preserve local identity and ensure affordable housing for residents. Thus, this study contributes to the broader discourse on sustainable urban tourism by providing empirical evidence from Porto, a city experiencing intense tourist activity and related challenges.

#### *Limitations and Future Research Directions*

One limitation of this study is its reliance on a single city as a case study, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other urban contexts. Additionally, while adequate for initial insights, the sample size could be expanded in future research to include a more diverse demographic profile of respondents. Future studies should also explore longitudinal data to assess how perceptions and impacts evolve over time. Further research could investigate similar dynamics in other cities with different cultural and economic backgrounds to provide a comparative analysis and deepen the understanding of the global impacts of short-term rental accommodation on urban communities.

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**Institutional Review Board Statement:** The study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki, and approved by the Ethics Committee of Portucalense University (protocol code CES/01/06/24 from 1 June 2024).

**Informed Consent Statement:** Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

**Data Availability Statement:** Data are contained within the article.

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